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BEER



Annette and Ray Ballesterio drinking their award-winning Castillo and La Boheme brews.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

A Brewing Romance

Alaro Craft Brewery is at heart a love story.

"We adore each other," said Annette Ballesterio, who co-owns Alaro with her husband of 10 years, Ray Ballesterio. "You have to be in business together."

In fact, early in their relationship, the Ballesterios would sit on their back porch, drinking Ray's delicious home brews, and dream about having their own place. "He was beer, I was food," she recalled. "And what the heck — it came true!"

In a series of fortunate events, the Ballesterios took over the former Rubicon Brewing Company space on Capitol Avenue in 2018. "So many brewers from UC Davis came through here," Ray said. "The brewing system is also pretty historic — it was designed by Dr. [Michael J.] Lewis at UCD and only two are in existence. It was like having a classic car and restoring it."

The Ballesterios also snagged the former Rubicon brewer, and UC Davis master brewer, Chris Keeton. "And he came to us as 'a package' with David Santana, who'd been a chef at Waterboy right next door," Ray said. "They'd long fantasized about opening something together."

The new team immediately began

producing award-winning craft beers — Ray's flagship brew, the classic IPA "Castillo," has won three gold medals — and pairing them with a Spanish-inspired menu.

Diners can choose between a variety of tapas, like caramelized Brussels sprouts, braised pork cheeks or — the restaurant's specialty — olive-oil-poached octopus with potato confit. "With our menu, you can have a vegan, someone gluten-free, a meat-eater, a seafood eater, all at the same table," Ray said.

Alaro's signature dish, however, is a seafood paella that can be ordered with a flight of four beers. "There are so many components in paella," Ray said. "And each beer pairs with one of those components."

Alaro also just started Sunday brunch, with mimosas (containing house-made fruit puree) and dishes like Shakshouka (poached eggs in spicy tomatoes and peppers). "It's the best-kept secret in town — there's no line yet," laughed Annette.

But Alaro's biggest draw may be the genuine affection between its owners, staff and customers — which seems to be creating a romantic buzz. "We are popular as a Friday date night spot," Annette said. "We have regulars who come in every week."

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Alaro will have a special Valentine's Day menu tomorrow and opens its back patio later this spring. Watch for upcoming paella dinners too. Alaro Craft Brewery, 2004 Capitol Ave., Sacramento, 916-436-7711, alarobrewing.com.

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